

Roosevelt's Home Letters

Interesting Collection Reveals Much of Character of the Great American

By Heywood Brown

THEODORE ROOSEVELT'S LETTERS TO HIS CHILDREN, Edited by Joseph Bucklin Bishop. Published by Scribner's. Writing to his children on the eve of the election of 1904, Theodore Roosevelt expressed some uncertainty about the outcome, but then added: "I don't think that any family has enjoyed the White House more than we have."

Everything in the collection of letters gathered by Joseph Bucklin Bishop tends to support this belief of the reader. For instance, we find him wondering in one letter whether it is quite the thing "for a stout, elderly President to be bounding over barriques in a wild effort to get to goal before an active member of a competitor aged nine years."

For our part we often find the character of Colonel Roosevelt as much of a puzzle as that of Daisy Ashford. There is about him, upon occasion, the same amazing quality of naivete which seems almost too perfect to be authentic. Thus, in a letter to his eldest son Ted, he speaks soberly to question whether it is wise for the boy to attempt to play football on the second night at Groton because his lack of weight makes it "quite likely to injure, and a little later he tells Kermit that he himself has been wrestling in the White House with two Japanese and adds, "My throat is a little sore, because I have been doing this Japanese wrestling, but when I am through with it this time I am not sure at all I shall ever try it again while I am so busy with other work as I am now."

By the time I get to 5 o'clock in the afternoon I will be feeling like a stewed owl after an eight hours' grapple with Senators, Congressmen, etc. Then I find the wrestling a little too vehement for mere rest. My right ankle and my left wrist and one thumb and both great toes are swollen sufficiently to make me feel as if I am a giant, and I am still of them had a struggle with them. Still, I have made good progress, and since you left they have not got about."

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By Sgt. Alexander Woolcott

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Announcement

Reviews of current magazines will appear each week on this page, provided we receive the magazines for review

A Woman's Woman

A New Novel Focusing On Woman and the Home

A WOMAN'S WOMAN. By Nalbro Bartley. Published by Small, Maynard & Co.

For this, at least, Nalbro Bartley, has earned a salute that she has merited. Her novel, "A Woman's Woman," is a real thing. She has looked around her at the shifting social panorama and recognized that something important is happening. In spite of the limitations and crudities of inference, it is a thing of value. This lifting of the wavering candle of her story to illumine contemporary social history—that gives her book a literary distinction.

Her heroine is a middle-aged woman, faced at the dawn of the twentieth century with the necessity for a painful readjustment of all the standards which she has been bred. All the orthodox virtues in which women have paid their way have by the modern shifting of thought suddenly depreciated in value so that if she would not admit herself bankrupt and outworn she must set herself to take account of her resources. In the reckoning she finds that the whole series of hearthstone virtues—her gift for patient drudgery, her will which she cannot let her respect for tradition—all this is small and insignificant, if not downright questionable coin. It is made good to buy her the respect of her family or the world she will come to regard family ties contemptuous. The younger plunges into social life, with all its modern disquieting freedom of inhibitions. The mother is left alone in her massive and intricate scheme of homemaking.

The story deals with her emergence into an individuality of her own. Her first timid assertions, her venture into economic independence, turning to shrewd business account her despised domestic gifts, her growth in assurance and sophistication are seen with the eye of a novelist. In finding her own interests she grows cynically indifferent to her children's vagaries. Bartley's world studio existence, Sally's equally weird social life, her husband's detachment, all come to trouble her. By force of an individuality that will not admit defeat she becomes economic head of the family and a personality. This is, by Miss Bartley's reckoning, the final catastrophe. And side by side with the disintegration of the family into its separate units there goes the attenuation of the home. It dwindles from a house, with its inextricably mingled ritual and no scandal was caused. Now I am stiff and heavy and any accident to me would cause immense talk, and I do not take the chance, simply because it is not worth while."

President Roosevelt wrote this shortly before he went to Africa to shoot lions.

Short Stories of America

SHORT STORIES OF THE NEW AMERICAN. Edited by Henry Holt & Co. New York. There are stories of genuine merit in Miss Lassell's collection, although several of her selections were evidently chosen for the benefit of juvenile readers. "A Little Kansas Legend," a touching and beautiful story by Dorothy Canfield's book "Home Fires in France," is easily the best piece of writing in the book. Albert Payson Terhune's "The Wildcat" is a good, rollicking humorous story of a Southern mountaineer, who was a dead shot, but hated army discipline.

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Yet it is, after all, a false front. Behind this smooth appearance is an horrible decadence, with dozens and dozens of new novels coming into being without any apparent design of the kind that may come with the twentieth century novel. These are novels of a new order, spindles, almost formless creatures, wandering restlessly through moods and passions, valleys, alleys, and over oceans, forcing hungrily through the facts of life as they are found glaringly on the hills under the widely revealing sun. The new novel, surely, ever comes to an agreement with existence or finds any moral solvent outside of the sheer fact of experience itself and the quietude that may come with it. It is the novel, in the hands of young people who have heard modern music, seen modern art and lived past the gamut of modern life, has become subjective, self-expressive, lyrical. As such it has only the kind of form which can be found in a sudden hillside prayer, Wordsworth's form in his most famous ode, or Shelley in his. It is the kind of form that marks Whitman, being in more than a half dozen ways the child of Whitman. It is already old-fashioned, so fast do the fashions go, to admit that the greatest modern discovery is sex, yet for a hundred years scientists and philosophers and artists to have been thinking of nothing but sex, from Newton to Freud, from Schopenhauer, through Nietzsche, Wagner, Rodin, Swinburne, Ibsen, Hardy, Meredith, Anatole France, Whitman, Samuel Butler, down to Bennett and Wells and "Green River." It is the accent of the time, and a good deal of energy was spent for a long time trying to make it possible for the action of the novel to be a discovery to-day. Shoddy and wasteful as modern life is, there was no lack of shoddy and waste in the old order, so the extravagance admires.

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And Miss Bartley is not satirical of the mother. This is about the quality of her social perceptions. It is against this depressing stagnation, this impenetrable dulness of outlook that her theme is finally wrecked. R. D.

By the Author of "Slippy McGee"

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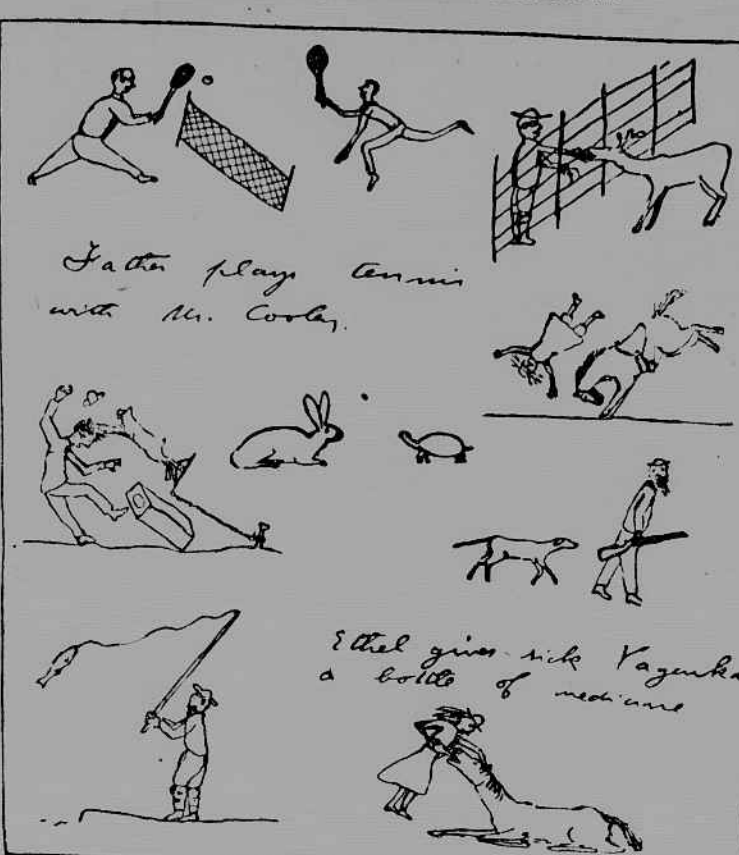
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About a Column

"Perhaps," said a recent Tribune book review, "we do not speak for the craft, but it is probable that book reviewers, as a rule, like best those books which are about 180 pages long, with wide margins and in large type."

We think you must have been reading "In the Sweet Dry and Dry," 148 pp.; nice margins; and what looks to us like 14 point; or, at any rate, 12 point, with enormous line space."

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY
BART HALEY.

From the Author of "Off Duty"

May I tell you that Oscar Wilde was always one of the men's favorite authors at camp, and it seemed well to include his story of finest merit in my volume for the reason that our enlisted men have too little of the best in literature in their menu?

Unfortunately the "Dere Mable" and "Casey at the Bat" type of story is too readily dealt out to our boys, the minority of whom I find really desire books of finer merit. O. Henry's story, "The Furnished Room," which you recommend, I would not use in a book which will perhaps be used in the army hospital wards as much (or more) as elsewhere. It seems best to include the more cheerful type of story for this purpose, as the sick men have less reason for asking for the other. You wonder why I have not included Irvin Cobb and Charles Van Loan? The use of stories by these authors was denied, though I made every effort to secure them.

The general public seems entirely unaware of the splendid books our enlisted men call for. It has never occurred to me to ask for them. Come and see the rough and ready best books in print. War stories are the least popular with them. My aim was to furnish a collection of the best authors in order to lead the men on to the worthwhile story and away from the cheaper ones which flood the market. WILHELMINA HARPER.

This serial pursuit of me by desperate Richard Desmond has not to stop. I surrender on all points and apologize for existing, writing, reading and thinking. If I don't, I shall have even my vote taken away from me, and election day is coming near.

When I made my first slighting allusion to François Villon as a "great poet but a yellow dog," I never dreamed that I was offending a personal friend of his. I thought it was safe to pick on Villon since he had been dead for several hundred years.

But, lo and behold, Mr. Desmond arose and demanded that The Tribune quit annoying its readers by printing my maudering of "moyage age psychology" because I was "enormously popular" and therefore could not know anything, and had doubtless taken my opinion of Villon from Stevenson's priggish remarks and not from my own clear mind of thought? Of John Payne and Stacpoole.

I am "enormously popular" I don't know, and neither does the enormous populace. I wish it were true, and I should not consider enormous popularity an enormity. Furthermore, it would by no means debar me from the privilege of study or argument.

In answer to my patient alignment of the facts about Villon, who is the real subject of the debate, Mr. Desmond comes back with a ferocious attack on me, and swats me with a resounding bludge over the place.

That is not what he dislikes my work so intensely as he likes to do with Villon. It is no luxury and no novelty to me to be lambasted in book-reviewing columns, yet I know of no body on earth who is so bitterly disappointed in my work as I am. I am a very nice man, an honest blacksmith and awfully goodhearted, yet I can't seem to get on paper what I want to say as ought to say it. As the paper said, "I wish it in so sweet and it comes out so sour."

He—Mr. Desmond—speaks of my "customary genial wrong-headedness." It is something to be genial. Mr. Desmond is not even that. And he has me at a frightful disadvantage, because when I quote a fact about Villon and he retorts with a contemptuous opinion of some work of mine I can't find any work of his to retaliate on.

Furthermore, I am utterly bewildered with my inability to understand his point of view, which seems to be this: If I express disapproval of Villon for beating a prostitute because she did not bring home a diamond ring, money for Villon, that action of Villon's becomes at once a sweet and beautiful deed if Mr. Desmond alleges that I wrote a farce called "Excuse Me" or that I was a "disgraceful, unpardonable sin" is "the falsification of life by art."

"Excuse Me" was an attempt to portray the peculiarities of American steering-cab life realistically and humorously. It happened to make financial success and to make multitudes of people laugh. I wish to God I could do another one.

But wherein does that accidental success debar me from criticizing anybody's literary work?

Aristophanes wrote a number of knockabout farces attacking ward heelers, street preachers, buffoons and others. Yet he criticised Euripides both as a man and as an author.

Charles Lamb wrote a farce about a man who tried to control the fact that his real name was "Hogarth." It ran one night, and he helped the audience hiss it off the stage.

If it had succeeded, would it have debarred him from commenting on Shakespeare and other playwrights? Or was it its failure that gave him the privilege of literary discussion?

Well, my first dramatic production ran one night in New York, and I have had some of the worst failures in dramatic record. Doesn't that convince Mr. Desmond that I have the inalienable privilege of free speech? Is Mr. Desmond one of those numerous pests that use the word "success" as a synonym for demerit, and "unpopularity" as a proof of genius?

Mr. Desmond won't even permit me to praise Villon's poetic achievements. He says that, since Villon wrote in set forms, I am idiotic to speak of him as a "marvellous technician." I had foolishly supposed that the ability to manipulate set forms was one of the primary tests of technique. Even his gospel, Stacpoole, says that the grand testament "must always live by virtue of its wonderful technique."